

# Beds

by Cheryl Diane Kidder

**May, 1987, San Francisco:** Called in sick at work for a week straight when I first met Tony. Every day waking up in my green, geometric-patterned southwest sheets, the skin on his palms darker than my nipples. Three mornings, pure fog out the lace curtains. I'd turn over against his back and close my eyes, only him between me and the light.

If we woke up again he'd pull the sheet over his back, smiling down on me and come in without knocking. No was never a possibility. My head bent back over the edge of the mattress, upside down rocking pictures of my nightstand, then dark, then the ceiling, cracked from recent tremors, then dark. Never wanted to leave the apartment then. We brought the dishes, a big tub of butter and just-popped toast over, eat for a while, push the dishes off onto the floor and climb under the sheets again.

If I'd had a Spanish-English dictionary we never would have had to leave but finally we wanted to say things to each other beyond bodily fluid type questions which could be signed. After that, the bed just seemed cold — all the built-up heat of that week dissipated into the room, out the cracks in the windowsills, moved out to sea with the fog.

**October, 1973, San Jose:** Comfortably worn cotton sheets on a doublewide futon the morning after my third or fourth frat party. Rick had a huge head of dark hair, curly, like his moustache, and a New York accent. He'd just been through EST and we'd talked about it for hours. Wine glasses on turned-over wooden crates, a couple of beaded necklaces, an ashtray half full of his cigarettes and a roach clip. Bedspread batiked and flimsy that would get caught up between my legs.

Rick taught philosophy and was fourteen years older than me. The bedroom's wood floor was full of cardboard boxes. Maybe he'd be moving in, maybe away, depending. Had to get up early for an early class. I took longer, though his place was always so cold. I shuffled

along the wood floor, collecting my things, turned the old glass door handle to go, smelled the incense we'd burned the night before.

**November, 1975, San Jose:** Huge stiff mattress, almost cutting into my back. Panty hose around my ankles and the soundman for that band I'd been photographing with his crooked dick, trying to find a way in. Door closed, bolted. Beyond the door, the party I'd just been at. How many drinks that time, not sure. His long hair all over my face and he's panting and pushing and I have no strength left at all.

The door opens two or three times, guys from the band, not the one I liked the looks of, only the ratty bass player and the second guitar. I can feel the hard stitches of the bedspread with my ass as he pushes me down into it.

I try to clamp my knees together but his hands are claws on my thighs and I can't keep resisting. I'm wearing my favorite blue dress with the bell sleeves, very short. It's around my neck right now and I wonder if it's been ripped and if it has if I can fix it. The two guys wonder back through the room and I turn my head and watch them every step of the way. When they disappear into the bathroom I think, I hope one of them can give me a ride home.

**February, 1986, San Francisco:** I figure if J.J. didn't have a waterbed this would be much easier. I'm thinking, damn it takes him a long time and I'm thinking, if I didn't have this fucking gag reflex thing this would be a lot easier. But with J.J. I don't even have my hands free. Always on top, always kneeling between his legs, always twisting his nipples just so, both at the same time. Shit, I don't mind. Like hell I don't mind. Maybe if this didn't take so long we could go get some Chinese before everything closes.

J.J.'s from Rhode Island, from money I'm guessing. Everything in his place is just so -- either black or white and chrome and glass. So modern. I hate when I get to bouncing, then I have to concentrate, relax and stop thinking such specific thoughts. Damn what I do for a hairy chest.

**Summer, 1979, San Jose:** Huge oak headboard with mirror, king size waterbed. Morning after a party given by KSJO and a long drive

at 3a.m. down 101 to a set of apartments that reeked of “singles”. More drinking, loud music, nobody dancing, couches full. Mr. LongHair and amazing beard and I retreat to his room at the end of the hall. Going to be late for work again. Mr. LongHair obviously incapable of intelligent conversation which bothers me less the more I look around his room: beer posters on the wall, skinny blonde women in groups of three hugging each other, asses sticking out of their shorts for the camera.

This one was easy to leave. Up and over the railing, picked up pieces of last night's ensemble in each of their different landing positions. Had to side-step the huge ashtray in the middle of the floor, almost out the door, no panties, tip-toe back to the bed, slowly, carefully lift the edge of the sheet, he doesn't stir, I snatch the crumbled up puddle of black silk, stuff them into my purse and go looking for my car.

**August 1976, The Lido, Venice:** First he had to hide me in the downstairs broom closet. When the coast was clear, we ran up the back stairs, peeped around the corner to the hallway, nobody there, three doors down, his room. It was still hot at 11p.m. even though he'd left the windows wide open. Outside the waiter's dorm, in the empty lot next door, a summer carnival: merry-go-round, booths, people in cotton dresses, children, cotton candy, music from the rides as they started up slowly and then frantically came up to speed.

He pushed me onto the top of the single bed with one hand then whipped off his shirt. His English wasn't that good and he didn't speak much. He left the lights out. Shadows and crazy blinking colored lights from the carnival played on the walls around us. There was barely room to move. The music from the carnival loud in my ears. I had to grip the sides of the bed with both hands when I screamed. He tried to put his hand over my mouth but I pushed it away and pulled him back in. Then, he just watched me for a while and spoke to me in Italian. I was laughing too hard to hear him.

**December, 1989, San Francisco:** Lots of blond hair. Ten, maybe fifteen years younger than me. Mattress on the floor of his room in

the Haight. His room smaller than the closet in my studio up on Leavenworth. Every inch of wall space covered with posters and articles and record jackets. Only a stereo and the bed. Lights on, too bright, too much information, couldn't take it all in. Lights out, sit down on the bed, too close to the floor. Close my eyes. Beer buzzing in my head.

I hear the zipper on my dress being unzipped in the back. Nice vintage dress — an Ava Gardner dress, worked well for me. He sat cross-legged in front of me and pulled it down to my waist. I rolled my head back and smiled. Fucking Damien, the boss's son. Not out of jail for a week and he's already back into it. I'd always wondered about him: cute little punk would always steal money out of the front register, we'd write up slips of paper and charge them to his dad. He'd thrown my new black bra somewhere now and unzipped his pants. Damn, this was just what I needed, a huge thick dick right in front of me and me barely able to keep my eyes open. He put his hand on the back of my neck. I closed my eyes and thought of popcycles and ice cream cones and all the years I'd chased him out of the back room when I was counting out the drawers.

**April, 1982, Los Angeles:** Six hour drive if you go 80 most of the way only to end up at the Ramada after a training session with the married teacher puking in the shiny clean toilet. By the iridescent light of the silent alarm I could see it was only 2:38a.m. — too late to get home to the wife, I smiled. I pulled a sheet up over my legs and turned to see what he would do next. The toilet flushed. He used my toothbrush, turned out the light slipped in next to me again. I told him I wouldn't kiss him again, he didn't care.

**Winter, 1986, San Francisco:** Walking home from the Market Street trolley I made the mistake of making eye contact with a man walking toward me. I remember the exact moment and that I made a conscious decision that this time I wouldn't look back down to the pavement when I noticed a handsome man. I looked full into his face and shit if he didn't look right at me and walk right on by, smiling.

Then his arm on my elbow and his voice very close in my ear. He was Israeli. His father was a baker. He was staying with friends in

the city. I took him home and he stayed with me for a month, trying to teach me Hebrew and explain things. I'd come home from work and he'd have made an elaborate dinner with pastries for dessert every night, after which he'd nearly fuck me into the ground. Truly, I did appreciate his intensity but I just didn't think I'd ever be able to learn Yiddish.

**October, 1988, Children's Hospital, San Francisco:** Started out about two in the morning. Woke up with side cramps, nothing worse than period cramps really. I sat up, thought about if I wanted to get alarmed or not. They went away. I laid back down. I'd been tired a lot lately so it was easy to go back to sleep. Tony never even woke up.

Woke up again at four a.m., in real pain now. I grabbed his arm and sat up too. He turned on the little light on the nightstand and looked at his watch with the second-hand and counted. Four minutes apart. OK. Call the doctor, get dressed, what happens next? Doctor says wait until they're about two minutes apart and call her back. I lay back in bed with my clothes on, terrified. I knew I wasn't ready for the pain part. I could sense Tony staring at the ceiling. He held my hand under the sheets and tried to be very still.

At eight a.m. we woke up again. I'd been moaning. I rolled out of bed and told him we're going to the hospital, I didn't care what the doctor said. Hospital admitted me, put me into a straight hard bed with clean worn sheets I couldn't even smell. Tony took a lot of walks. Nurses took my temperature, my blood pressure, timed the contractions. They weren't close enough together for me to stay in the hospital. Tony had to take me home again. I climbed back into my own bed, holding onto the watch, waiting for the next knock at the door.

**September, 1994, Marin:** Insomnia every night. The bed is cold and still. I've turned up the heat to eighty-five and put on flannel. Sometimes Bill snores. I lean over, push a little on his shoulder and he rolls onto his side and stops. I roll onto my side and watch the car lights play along the closet door. The bedroom door is open so I can hear Lily if she gets up in the middle of the night. The bed's big

enough for me to roll onto my back and hike up my nightgown. I'm careful to stay close to my edge of the bed and make no big movements that might wake him up.

I spread my legs thinking about bikers, or truck drivers or going for an interview with some powerful older man who has special ideas about trying out for a job. I mull over the two or three porn movies I've sneaked downstairs and paid for in the middle of the night, rehashing a few scenes over and over. After two or three times I'm finally able to drift off somewhere else, somewhere other than this bed.

